

HOLY WEEK MEDITATION 2020

MONDAY

It was on the Monday that religion got in the way.

An outsider would have thought that it was a pet shop's fire sale. And the outsider, in some ways, wouldn't have been far wrong.

Only it wasn't household pets, it was pigeons that were being purchased.

And it wasn't a fire sale; it was a rip-off stall in a holy temple, bartering birds for sacrifice. And the price was something only the rich could afford. No discounts to students, pensioners, disabled types or UB40 card holders.

Then he, the holiest man on earth, went through the bizarre bazaar like a bull in a china shop. So the doves got liberated and the pigeon sellers got angry. And the police went crazy and the poor people clapped like mad, because he was making a sign that God was for everybody, not just for those who could afford him.

He turned the tables on Monday... The day that religion got in the way.

Reading: Matthew 21: 12-17

² Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³ "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers."

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.

¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

¹⁶ "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read,

"From the lips of children and infants
you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?"

¹⁷ And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Prayer

Lord God, as we remember the events of Holy Week and the journey that Jesus made to the cross, help us to journey with him in heart and mind and to learn more of your loving purposes for us. Help us to remember what is truly important and help us to know that you care for us all. Amen.

TUESDAY

It was on the Tuesday that he gave it to them in the neck.

If you had been there you would have thought that a union official was being taken to task by a group of back bench Tory MPs. Or that the chairman of a multinational corporation was being interrogated by left wing activists posing as shareholders.

They wanted to know why and they wanted to know how.

They were the respectable men, the influential men, the establishment.

The questions that they asked ranged from silly schoolgirl speculations about whether you would be a bigamist in heaven if you had married twice on earth, to what was the central rule of civilised behaviour.

They knew the answers already... or so they thought, otherwise they would never have asked the questions.

And like most of us they were looking for an argument with no intention of a change of heart.

So he flailed them with his tongue... those who tried to look interested, but never wanted to be committed.

And that was on the Tuesday...the day when he gave it to them..to us... in the neck.

Reading: Matthew 21: 23-27

²³ Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

²⁴ Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" ²⁶ But if we say, 'Of human origin'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

²⁷ So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

Prayer

Lord God, as we remember the events of Holy Week and the journey that Jesus made to the cross, help us to listen to his teaching even when the messages are hard. Help us to remember what is truly important and help us to know that you care for us all. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

It was on the Wednesday that they called him a waster. The place smelt like the perfume department of a big store. It was as if somebody had bumped their elbow against a bottle and sent it crashing to the floor, setting off the most expensive stink bomb on earth. But it happened in a house, not a shop. And the woman who broke the bottle was no casual afternoon shopper. She was the penniless poorest of the poor, giving away the only precious thing that she had. And he sat still while she poured the liquid over his head.. as unnecessary as aftershave on a full crop of hair and a bearded chin. And those who smelt it, and those who saw it, and those who remembered that he was against extravagance, called him a waster. They forgot that he was also the poorest of the poor. And they who had much and who had given him nothing, objected to a pauper giving him everything. Jealousy was in the air when a poor woman's generosity became an embarrassment to their tight fistedness... That was on the Wednesday, when they called him a waster.

Reading: Matthew 26: 6-13

⁶ While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, ⁷ a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

⁸ When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. ⁹ "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

¹⁰ Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³ Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Prayer

Lord God, as we remember the events of Holy Week and the journey that Jesus made to the cross, help us to be ready to give up our comforts in order to open our hearts and hands to receive Jesus' love. Help us to remember what is truly important and help us to know that you care for us all. Amen.

THURSDAY

It was on the Thursday that he became valuable. He hadn't anything to sell... not since leaving his hammer and saw three years earlier. Needless to say, he could knock together a set of trestles or hang a couple of shelves at the drop of a hat, no trouble at all. But he wasn't into making things. Not now. He was into...well.. talking I suppose. And listening and healing and forgiving and encouraging... all the things for which there is no pay and the job centre has no advertisements. So his work wasn't worth much. Nor indeed was he. For, not being well dressed or well heeled or well connected, he wouldn't have attracted many ticket holders had he been put up for raffle. But he had a novelty value.. like the elephant man or the fat lady or the midget at the circus. Put him on a stage and he might be interesting to look at. Sell him to the circus with the promise of some tricks and there might be a silver penny, or two... or thirty in it. It was on the Thursday that he became valuable.

Reading: Matthew 26: 14-30

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

¹⁷ On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

¹⁸ He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" ¹⁹ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

²⁰ When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.

²¹ And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

²² They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"

²³ Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

²⁵ Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?"

Jesus answered, "You have said so."

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

³⁰ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Prayer

Lord God, as we remember the events of Holy Week and the journey that Jesus made to the cross, help us to watch and wait and remain faithful, even when times are hard and others run away, even when we are tired and scared. Help us to remember what is truly important and help us to know that you care for us all. Amen.

FRIDAY

It was on the Friday that they ended it all.

Of course they didn't do it one by one. They weren't brave enough. All the stones at the one time or no stones thrown at all.

They did it in crowds... in crowds where you can feel safe and lose yourself and shout things you would never shout on your own, and do things you would never do if you felt the camera was watching you.

It was the crowd in the church that did it, and a crowd in the civil service that did it, and a crowd in the street that did it, and a crowd on a hill that did it.

And he said nothing.

He took the insults, the bruises, the spit on the face, the thongs on the back, the curses in the ears. He took the sight of his friends turning away, running away.

And he said nothing.

He let them do their worst until their worst was done, as on the Friday they ended it all... and would have finished themselves had he not cried, "Father forgive them"...

And began the revolution.

Reading: Mark 15: 21-39

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. ²² They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the

place of the skull"). ²³ Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

²⁵ It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left.

²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!" ³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself!" ³² Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

³³ At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

³⁴ And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

³⁵ When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."

³⁶ Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.

³⁷ With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

³⁸ The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Prayer

Lord God, as we remember the events of Holy Week and the journey that Jesus made to the cross, help us to recognise the goodness of Good Friday. May we know the hope that you give from a place of despair and may we receive the forgiveness that you offer on the cross. Help us to remember what is truly important and help us to know that you care for us all. Amen.

Hymn StF 287

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.



SATURDAY

It was on the Saturday that he was not there.

Those who don't like corpses can't stay away from graveyards, unless there is some prohibition to stop them revisiting the dead end of their hopes and dreams.

It's as if they think that should the voice speak again, it will speak there or a sunbeam will dance or a flower will shoot and give a sign of misinterpreted life.

But close the cemetery and confine through custom or constraint, the wailing ones to the house and it looms larger... the loss, the lostness, the losers.

Men shiver in an upstairs room, warm though the day is. Women weep in an uncharmed circle. Memory is forced on memory. The mind's eye tries to trace the profile and the face, the smile, the gentle twitching of the nose... and fails. And a panic sets in because it seems he can't be remembered. Was he ever known?

It was on the Saturday that he was not there.

Reading: Matthew 27: 57-61

⁵⁷ As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. ⁵⁹ Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, ⁶⁰ and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

Prayer

Lord God, as we remember the events of Holy Week and the journey that Jesus made to the cross, help us to wait with hope and never to lose our faith in you. Help us to remember what is truly important and help us to know that you care for us all. Amen.



Reading: 1 Corinthians 15: 12-23

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Silent reflection

Blessing

Glory be to God the Father whose love is over us.

Glory be to Jesus whose love shares our human lives.

Glory be to the Holy Spirit alive and powerful as love within us.

To the one God, eternal love, be glory and praise forever. Amen

Sing/read Jesus Christ is waiting StF 251

Jesus Christ is waiting, waiting in the streets;

no one is his neighbour, all alone he eats.

Listen, Lord Jesus, I am lonely too.

Make me, friend or stranger,

fit to wait on you.

Jesus Christ is calling, calling in the streets,

'Who will join my journey?

I will guide their feet.'

Listen, Lord Jesus, let my fears be few.

Walk one step before me; I will follow you.



It was on... Opening reflections from "Stages on the way" Wild Goose Worship
Blessing by Ian Cowie Taken from "Eggs and Ashes" Wild Goose Worship
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